

Dance Index



DANCE IN BALI

by Colin McPhee

W. S. Williams



Ritual gabor dancers presenting offerings before a shrine

Dance Index

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Comment

Perhaps nowhere in the world is dancing so much a part of everyday life as in Bali. The very name of this tiny Indonesian island, with its ornate, pagoda-like temples, tropic landscape not too extravagant to be credible, and wonderfully handsome people, immediately suggests tinkling music and exotic dancing, but these have a tendency to merge into a composite "oriental" pattern wherein there are no very clear distinctions between the Balinese and other far-eastern forms. An appreciation of the particular qualities and characteristics which distinguish Balinese dancing requires a rather special and sympathetic approach. Neither an ethnologic nor a purely technical discussion will quite suffice. To accept and respond to such a formalized expression of a totally different culture we need a perception of another people's way of life—their doctrines and ideals, and the relation of these to their artistic endeavor.

It would be hard to imagine anyone better equipped to present this essential, warm, living background than the composer and critic, Colin McPhee, a recognized authority on the subject. Mr. McPhee went to Bali to make a study of Balinese music, for which purpose he settled down among the inhabitants and assimilated the very breath and substance of their life and activities. Among his various writings he produced a book

about the people and their music (*A House in Bali*, The John Day Co., 1946) which contains some of the most lucid descriptions of dancing it has been my good fortune to read.

Persuaded to consider the matter of dancing further, and as the main theme for an issue of DANCE INDEX, Mr. McPhee has contributed a fascinating chapter to the history of this art. With no pretenses to expert critical knowledge outside his own field, he yet emerges as the perfect guide into the intricacies of Balinese dance and drama, which are inseparable one from the other, and both, equally, from music. Through his sensitive observation the pageant unfolds as a comprehensible whole and in vivid detail—a complex design of unfamiliar elements and traditions which suddenly acquire meaning.

Though few authors could be less dependent upon actual illustrations to help convey their impressions, Mr. McPhee seems always to have had his camera with him and is clearly gifted with an enviable instinct for closing the shutter at exactly the right moment. Except for the pictures on pages 156, 157, 158, 159 and 203, all the photographs we have reproduced were taken by him, and in themselves constitute a remarkable and stunning record of a whole dance idiom.

M.E.

COVER: The Raven in the légong dance

Vol. VII, Nos. 7, 8, 1948.

Subscription \$5.00 a year. This issue \$1.00

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Dancing apsaras. Detail of sculpture relief from the temple of Banteai Srei at Angkor

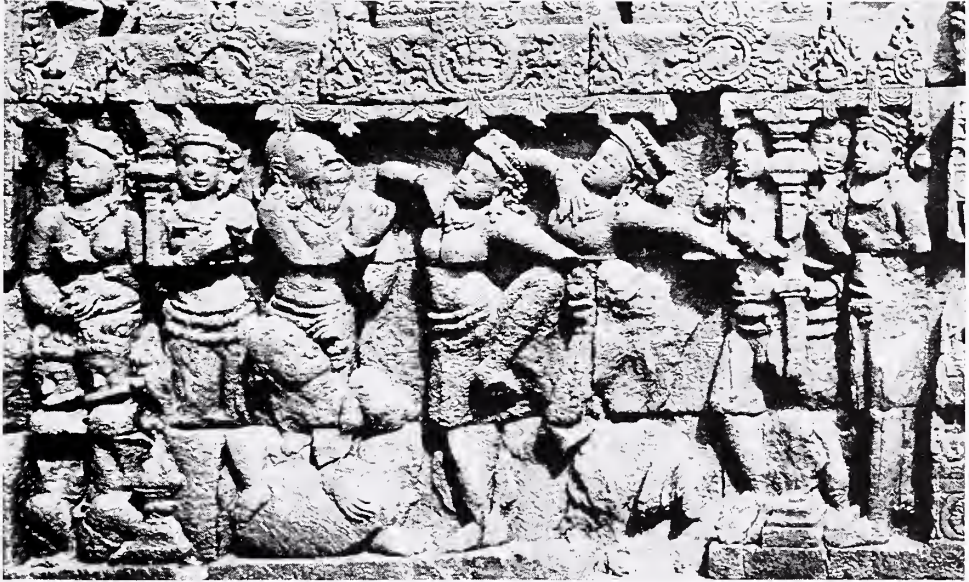
DANCE IN BALI

by Colin McPhee

Until the last war, Southeast Asia was a legendary region where dance and music of the antique Orient had been miraculously preserved. Travellers returned with fabulous accounts of dance schools in Cambodia and Siam and the spectacular dancers of the courts. In the palaces of the Javanese Sultans in Jogjakarta and Surakarta, dancers moved with a perfection and purity of style, a grace and mystic serenity that once seen could never be forgotten. In the temples and villages of Bali, the small island to the east of Java, dramatic dances and colorful plays and mask ballets took place throughout the year. In palaces or beneath the trees, the highly trained dancers and actors moved in perfect synchronization to the resonant music of orchestras composed of gongs, gong-chimes, drums, small flutes and ancient cymbals. Travellers to more remote regions—Sumatra, Celebes, or the innumerable small islands that dot the Indonesian Archipelago—brought back precious films of archaic ritual dances, fertility, courtship, animal, wrestling and weapon dances that were still performed on festive occasions. Here was a complete history of the dance of antiquity—the simple magic rite, the luxury performance of the court, the formal offering in the temple and the popular entertainment of the village.

Surely it was here that the dance as a pure, impersonal art of significant

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Hindu-Javanese dancers. Detail of sculpture relief from the monument of Borobodor in Central Java

gesture and movement had reached a final stage of perfection. While in the more remote villages dance was simple and almost primitive, in the palaces there was an apparently endless variety of historical plays and dance pantomimes with elaborate choreographies, whose performers were reared under princely patronage and court supervision in the best Oriental feudal tradition. Here the past survived astonishingly intact. Gestures and poses of dancers carved on the walls and columns of thirteenth century Hindu-Cambodian temples at Angkor were still taught in Cambodian and Siamese dance schools. Balinese and Javanese dancers still assumed the postures of dancing figures in Hindu-Javanese temple reliefs of the same period. Hindu culture, penetrating these lands a thousand years before, had brought, along with the new gods of Buddhism and Shivaism, a wealth of literature and legends. These supplied the source material for plays and dances surviving through the centuries. Principles of the dance set forth in ancient Hindu treatises formed the basis for later dance developments. In the courts, generations of performers had refined the dance into a subtle and abstract art of restraint, exquisite balance, harmonious movement and gesture, so that dancers now moved with an almost literary perfection, a stylistic idealization of the gods and heroes as they were portrayed in sculpture and in poetry.

Yet even the simplest farmer from the fields could admire and enjoy the dance-plays of the court, with their casts of gods and demons, fairies, magic birds,

noble monkeys, princes and princesses. Stylized as the choreographies were, the movements of the dancers were not unfamiliar. Over and over they reflected the more archaic dances of the village, the countless ceremonial dances that went back to pre-Hindu times, when life was governed by the worship of ancestor souls and divinities of forest, lake and sea. Even in the modern courts, the dance retained a magic and ceremonial character; dramas were a blend of history, legend and religion, with the moral atmosphere of a medieval Mystery. The dancers themselves, in their remoteness and perfection, seemed half shadow, half incarnation of the gods.

Closely related though they are, the dance styles of Cambodia, Java and Bali create three entirely different impressions. Both Indian and Chinese influences have been absorbed and combined in different degrees of intensity; each country, depending on its contacts, has long since evolved a dance and music unmistakably its own, with its own elusive atmosphere and mood. Cambodian and Siamese dancers move with a peculiar elasticity and almost serpentine suppleness; curves are emphasized in the apparently jointless back-turned hands, the flexible arms,



Siamese dancers. Court dance drama. Photograph: Galloway

the rounded postures of the body. The dancers are trained to dazzling, almost mechanical perfection, smooth as a tight-rope act; they move with bright alertness to the rapid, brittle music of small, percussive orchestras pitched high in the treble, animated in speed, and filled with little glissandos and tremolos that sparkle like the costumes.

The Javanese dancer moves with a slow and wonderful muscular control, a dreamlike gravity that recalls the classical No plays of Japan. All is pure technical *tour de force*, yet there is no display of brilliance. Motion is spacious and fluid, but at the same time there is a certain angularity; the joints of the arms and legs are emphasized structurally rather than concealed. While Cambodian dancers seem forever on the verge of springing into the air and vanishing, the Javanese rest firmly on the ground, slowly shifting the weight of the body from one foot to the other as they proceed. In their composure and detachment, their aristocratic bearing, they create an indescribable atmosphere of mystic serenity. They translate into movement the soft, shockless music of the "gamelan" (orchestra of gongs,

Javanese dancers. Dance drama at the court of Jogjakarta



keyed instruments, drums and cymbals), stately in tempo and constructed in long phrases that are punctuated at intervals by the deep, vibrating gongs, struck always a fraction *after* the beat, as though to intensify the mood of timeless calm.

Against these two opposing styles the Balinese stands out dramatically in its freedom, its exuberance and almost feverish intensity. Although the ritual dances of the temple and the ancient dance plays of the court have the grave serenity of the Javanese, the trained dancers of today, who appear in plays or by themselves, give theatrical, dynamic performances, wild, moody, filled with sunlight and shade like the rushing, shimmering music of the Balinese gamelan. Rhythms are taut and syncopated throughout, and filled with sudden breaks and unexpected accents. Gongs and metal-keyed instruments are struck with small, hard mallets so that tones are bright and incisive. Dance movement is not conceived in a single broad, legato line, but is continually broken by fractional pauses that coincide with the breaks in the music; on these the dancer comes to a sudden stop, and the eyes of the spectators focus momentarily on a motionless, sharply defined pose. These breaks are not endings but phrase accents, like brief "rests" in music; they last no longer than a flash, and serve as starting points for renewed and vigorous movement. Unlike the almost inaudible drumming in Javanese music, Balinese drums throb continuously in agitated crescendos and diminuendos that forever urge the dancers onward or hold them back.

Cambodian, Javanese and Balinese dancers all use their hands in brilliant, crystallized gestures that add the final significant accent to the body in motion. Hands never relax, are never vague, casual or forgotten. All dancers use as basic leg technique the turned out thighs, knees and feet typical of Hindu sculpture. In each country dancers move to music based on quadruple rhythm. Triple rhythm, with its contrast of strong and weak beats, is inconceivable. Dance is without climax, proceeding from sustained, even tension throughout. With these features in common, each country has solved in its own way the plastic movement of the dancer, his projection into space, his method of covering the stage and reaching his audience. Cambodian dancers are fanciful Emperor's nightingales—Javanese the mystic reincarnation of the gods. The Balinese combine something of the nature of both with a fresh vitality and irresistible personal charm.

Bali, Past and Present

Hinduism reached Bali in the early centuries of this era, both directly and by way of Java. Traders, followed by priests and princes, arrived on both islands about the same time, to introduce Indian culture and impose the feudal system on a purely communal society. During the great Javanese empire which flourished until the fifteenth century, Bali was sometimes a vassal state, sometimes free. As Mohammedanism began to spread through Java, many Javanese princes migrated to Bali, bringing with them their court entourages of dancers, actors, musicians, sculptors, poets, craftsmen and warriors. With the final Islamic conquest of Java, all cultural exchange between the two islands ended. One by one the other islands were con-



Right: ritual gabor dancer



Left: Balinese goddess. 19th century

verted, but the Balinese held firmly to their religion and way of life. Until Dutch conquest in 1906, which brought in its train schools, hospitals, taxation, Boy Scout clubs and tourists, a medieval world had survived intact.

Today,* the dance as sacred rite or theatrical entertainment for gods and mortals still flourishes. No temple feast, no reception in any of the larger palaces, no village holiday is conceivable without a long program of traditional dances, plays and music, performed by highly skilled dancers and musicians. In even the smallest mountain village untrained girls and women perform the simple but beautiful ritual dances they learned watching their mothers during annual temple ceremonies. Special magic dances still take place to protect the villages from sickness.

During the month of New Year holidays, the even routine of village life is

* The author left Bali in 1939. According to reports received since the end of the war, the situation has not greatly changed.

Players in the gambuh court gamelan



broken by the appearance of travelling actors, dancers and musicians from the more animated lowlands. In the daytime tall masked figures dance grotesquely and sing erotic songs; the *barong*, the great masked, four-footed dragon, dances from door to door, snapping wooden jaws to drive away all demons. At night along the road, the *jogéd*, the public dancing-girl, draws a crowd of youths and men who step forth in turn to dance with her. Balinese operetta companies with casts of singing actors and actresses, bring romantic plays in Malayan-Chinese style, while men, women and children gather under the trees to watch from midnight to dawn the classical plays performed by little shadow-puppets shown against a lighted screen.

The large and prosperous villages of the lowlands from whence the dancers come, present a very different picture. Villages are divided into wards, each with its temples, music clubs, and societies that specialize in one form of dance-play or another. Some groups exist for purely ritualistic events; others solely for the pleasure of rehearsing, and performing in public. Musicians, dancers and actors live for the most part by farming or fishing; some are goldsmiths, wood-carvers, makers of masks or shadow-puppets.

The Clubs

To be a dancer or musician and not belong to a club or society is unthinkable. In Balinese village organization no one lives or works independently. Each man owes labor to the village in the upkeep of roads, field irrigation and temple repairs. Each helps the next with his rice harvest; for temple feasts the women unite in preparing the offerings, while men do the elaborate cooking. Dancers, actors, puppeteers and musicians all contribute to the festival of programs arranged as much for the entertainment of the village as for the pleasure of the gods.

The club system sets the pattern for all activities, from road-mending to music-making. Clubs range from serious to frivolous, from the group that has inherited the task of playing for temple ritual to the carefree Kite Flyers' Club, Palmwine Drinkers' Association, or the society devoted to cricket fighting. In the village where I first lived, with a population of perhaps two thousand, there were at least ten music clubs to play for the different rituals, processions, dances and plays, each specializing in *légong*, *kebyar* or *gandrung* performances. There was the society that performed the *chalonarang* witch drama, a shadowplay group, a Dragon Society and two rival operetta companies. Each club had its special gamelan or ensemble of gongs, metallophones, xylophones and other percussion instruments. Each club had its special musical repertoire, depending on the dance or drama the members had decided to present.

The club is largely a male organization. Musicians of the gamelan include boys of ten and men of fifty. Classical plays are performed by men alone, youths taking feminine roles. The casts of modern operettas include boys and girls in their teens and a few older men. The accent is on youth in most dances today, and clubs find nothing strange in training and presenting as star attraction gifted

small boys or girls of seven or eight. The object of these clubs? "A little pleasure, a little profit. . . . To please the gods. . . . So that the village may have a good name." Since most performances are free, there is generally little profit.

Club members are fined for absence from rehearsal or performance, and repeated absence may bring expulsion. Successful professional clubs, hired by other villages, invest their money in coconut or rice plantations, and divide the profits annually. Star dancer and least musician of the gamelan share alike in dividends. Less ambitious societies spend their money on music- and dance-teachers, handsome goldleaf costumes and expensive musical instruments. Like ballet companies everywhere, Balinese dance societies and clubs have their sudden quarrels and re-organizations, their periods of brilliance and decline.

Against the village activity stands the palace or smaller residence of the prince or noble. Once important cultural centers with their troupes of actors, dancers and musicians, the courts no longer can afford these luxuries. Today nearly all creative activity occurs outside the palace. Yet the best trained dancers, the finest gamelans are found in those villages which once came closest to palace influence. Balinese princes still pride themselves on their dancing and acting, appearing in traditional plays and heroic mask dramas; a few still train their own dancers and musicians. They continue to follow the pattern outlined in an old Javanese treatise on the conduct of a prince: "A man of condition should be versed in the history and literature of the past. He must know how to play in the gamelan and understand the *kawi* language (ancient literary Javanese). He must be clever in painting, wood-carving, gold- and iron-work, needle-work, the making of shadow-puppets and musical instruments. He must also be skilled in horsemanship and the management of an elephant, and have the courage to destroy all wicked men and drive away all women of loose character."

The Gamelan

The swift, aerial music of the Balinese orchestra, or gamelan, fills the open air with chiming resonance. Innumerable little gongs, large and small xylophone-like instruments with ringing bronze keys blend in an intricate polyphony that floats above the throbbing drums and periodic accents of deep and vibrant gongs. The air is shattered with a continuous shower of bright, percussive sound as the difficult music is performed by thirty or forty carefully rehearsed musicians. The music itself is based on a five-tone scale; beneath the complex ornamental patterns lies melody of unique grace and charm, constructed according to metric forms that have mathematically balanced proportions.

The tone color and instrumentation of the gamelan varies with the nature of the performance. Small flutes, a pair of drums, cymbals and a bamboo gong are enough to accompany the dancing and light, delicate singing of the *arja* operetta. The popular *jogéd* street dance takes place to the gay, staccato sound of an orchestra of xylophones. The large gamelan that accompanies historical mask plays and the heroic *baris*, or warrior-drill dances, has a brilliant, heavily metallic sound and an



Gangsa players in the court gamelan



Cymbals and bells in the lélong gamelan

G'ndér player in the lélong gamelan



almost barbaric splendor, while the music for the swift, humming-bird movements of the little *légong* dancers is filled with an indescribable, sensuous iridescence. In and out of the glittering figuration the melody weaves, stressed softly from time to time by gongs of different pitches, while from beneath, the restless, agitated drums rise and fall, their syncopations intensified by the thin clash of tiny cymbals.

The dancer is aware of all these separate strands—the melody, figuration, metric accents of the gongs and rhythm of the drums. All of these are danced; the melody is phrased by the hands, arms and body; the sparkling figuration is reflected in the faintly trembling hands; the progress of the dancer, the tempo and tense inner movement forever impelled by the rhythm of the drums.

The two drummers lead the orchestra. They are at the same time the vital link that connects the dancer with the music. Without them the musicians cannot play, the dancers cannot move. They sit in front of the other musicians, their eyes fixed on the dancers, bending forward tensely over the drums held crosswise in their laps. The drums are “male and female,” and are pitched differently, the former having the higher, more penetrating sound. They interlock in intricate patterns, of which there are many formulas, depending on the nature of the dance. The male drummer, leader of the two, and guiding spirit of the whole performance, is frequently the teacher of the dancers. He must at least have rehearsed with them many times, to know their movements and changes of tempo. A performance can be ruined by a sluggish drummer or a lack of perfect sympathy between him and the dancer. So important is this relationship that dancers engaged to appear with other gamelans will bring along their own leading drummer and cymbal player. Musicians can take their tempos easily enough from a strange drummer, but the dancer feels ill at ease, for dance and drumming fit like hand and glove.

The Audience

Everyone goes to dance performances. At night, when by the village market or in the clearing before the temple some performance is taking place, the houses of the village are dark and empty.

Children see dances and plays from the time they can walk. No audience is complete without its front row of naked tots who line the edges of the dance clearing like birds along a telegraph wire. They watch intently, with absorbed interest, napping intermittently as the night approaches dawn. Small boys are so familiar with the stories of the plays, the details of dancers' gestures and costume that village walls are covered with drawings of actors, dancers and shadow-puppets. They organize dramatic societies in imitation of the older boys, rehearse and give their own plays for other children.

Audiences are critical. People will leave their village and walk fifteen miles to see a famous dancer or cast of stars. Their interest quickly wanes at dull performances; uninteresting or imperfectly trained dancers and actors frequently find their audience melting away long before the play is over. The play is of far less importance than the performance, and actors are admired for their appearance,

style, declamation or the florid ornamentation of “flowers” in their singing. Dancers appeal through their technical perfection, their personal charm, and above all their hair’s-breadth synchronization of movement with the rhythmic syncopated music. Adverse criticism of a performance will point out that the musicians were not sufficiently together, while the dancer “lacked suppleness,” his gestures “lacked clarity” and the timing of his movement with the music was “always a little late.”

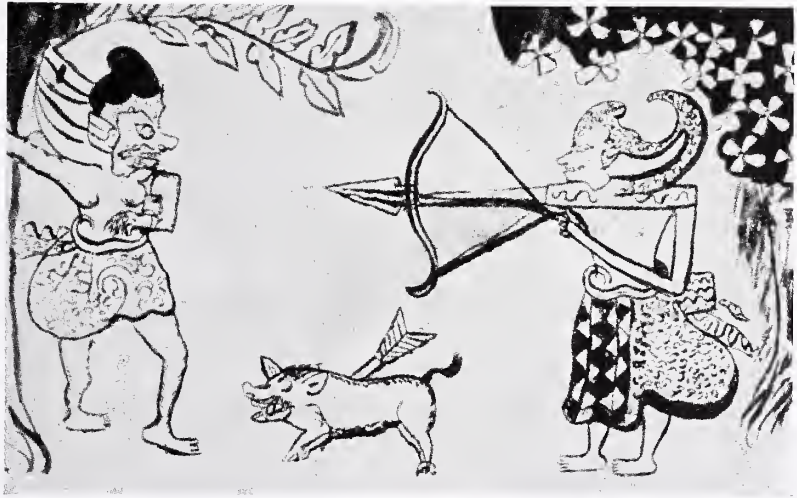
The Plays

The ancient Hindu and Javanese epics and romances which form the substance of Balinese literature and theatre are translated in endless different ways. The same heroic figures recur in temple sculpture and shadowplay, painting, mask drama and dance performance. The audience watches with equal pleasure puppet, masked actor or dancer, lost in a legendary world where gods and heroes are perpetually engaged in conflict with demons and the dark forces of the underworld.

The characters of the plays are flat and two-dimensional. “Good” or “evil,”

Children performing their version of the barong play





Drawing of puppets by an eight-year-old Balinese boy

divine or destructive, they are allied once and for all with one side or the other, irreconcilable as the opposing forces of "Paradise Lost" or a Western movie. Heroes are divided into two fundamental types, the *alus*, or fine, and the *kras*—the stronger or violent. Prince Arjuna, delicate of limb and feature, exalted in motive, reserved in attitude, is the *alus* hero *par excellence*. He is the abstraction of all noble qualities. He moves with feminine, almost catlike grace. His expression is one of mystic serenity, eyes half closed "like a rice grain," mouth set in a "brave-sweet" smile. If he speaks, his voice will be pitched high in artificial falsetto. If he sings, he will use the upper register of the voice. His strength is spiritual; it comes from within, magically acquired through ascetic meditation. "Even in battle he remains tranquil."

A *kras* character stands in sharp contrast. His strength is purely physical and he moves with impulsive energy. The eyes are round and staring, the mouth turned down at the corners. The gestures of the dancer are wide and vigorous, his advances menacing. His voice is loud and deep, and if he sings he uses resonant chest tones.

There is, of course, infinite variety in character types, each with its special stylistic variations, from *alus* prince to demon king. The more romantic plays have casts that balance and diminish in importance like a set of chessmen. Priest opposes witch; prince, minister and attendants of the "right" side are matched with prince, minister and attendants of the "left"; princess and lady-in-waiting are balanced by false princess and stepmother. Actors and dancers fill the roles most suited to their physical appearance. A graceful youth, small boned and finely featured, will play both *alus* hero and princess; a robust, muscular physique is needed for *kras* types. Dancers specialize in one style or another; an audience will accept without comment the appearance of an elderly man with drooping moustache, famous for his elegance and *alus* style, in the pathetic role of abandoned princess.



Topéng (mask play). Kras actor and attendant

Character types in the different plays closely resemble each other in appearance, costume and movement. The same *alus* mask or the same *alus* facial expression is used for the princes Rama, Arjuna or Panji, and the chief distinguishing differences lie in the stylistic detail of costume, crown or headdress. An audience may watch for an hour the formal dance-entrance of a dozen princes, ministers and attendants, but only when the dialogue begins and some name or clue word has been dropped will the characters become persons and the plot "emerge." Yet even now there can be considerable confusion. Gods, kings, priests, witches and demons speak in old Javanese, understood only by the scholars in the audience. Every speech must be translated in turn into colloquial Balinese by an attendant, who confirms each statement in something like the following:



Topéng (mask play). Alus actor and attendant



Arjuna (chanting in Javanese): I now step forth and bend my magic bow. . . .

Attendant (translating): Yes, my Lord, indeed yes. Just as you say. Do deign to step out, right over this way, and draw your bow. (*Aside, to second attendant*): Good Lord! How terrible he looks in his anger! How frightened I am! I really can't stand it much longer. . . .

Arjuna: I place a golden arrow in my bow. . . .

Attendant: Ah! The beautiful golden arrow. . . . It will surely kill the boar. . . . etc., etc.

Only in the comedy scenes that alternate with heroic episodes is the audience brought down to the world of reality. Now is the time for improvised puns and

farce, sly parody and rough humor. Boorish peasants are frightened by demons; drunken priests have altercations with Dutch Colonial officials or tourists. All is fantasy and escape from the rarified atmosphere of the heroic action. These scenes have only the slightest connection with the main plot. The audience breaks into loud, delighted laughter at the jokes, and the episodes can be prolonged indefinitely.

At this relaxed tempo, plays may last all night. Many performances are engaged "from midnight to three," or "from midnight till dawn." I once asked two boys of my household about the play they had seen the night before.

"What was the story?"

"The story never emerged."

"But how could you possibly stay till morning?"

"Oh, the costumes were all new. There was an excellent new dancer. And the clowns were so very funny!"

Yet, with their free, half-improvised construction, the plays can be neatly telescoped to a rapid end, should a sudden downpour of rain make it necessary. Then, in a flurry of activity, wrongs are righted, princesses rescued, and in ten minutes the performance ground is deserted.

The Ritual Significance

The performance of plays and dramatic dances in Bali is still something of an ancestral rite, in which the hereditary gods are evoked and their deeds enacted.

Worship of ancestor gods forms the core of Balinese religion. The objective of any temple feast is to renew contact with the departed village forefathers. They are ceremonially invited to descend to the shrines prepared for them, to be feasted and entertained. Before they depart, advice and favors will be asked of them; they speak through the voice of a medium fallen in trance.

The protective gods inhabit the mountains. In the earth, lurking at crossroads or in ravines are the demons, a retinue of dangerous sprites to be constantly propitiated. No village is without its two main temples, one for the village ancestors, the other by the graveyard for the yet unpurified dead and all destructive forces.

Ancient Hindu gods and heroes have long since been incorporated into a purely Balinese pantheon. Shiva, Lord of all, inhabits the highest mountain of Bali. Durga, goddess of death and the underworld, is patroness of all Balinese sorcerers and practitioners in black magic. The shadowplay or stage play is in essence a symbolic conflict between god and demon, light and darkness, life and death.

The masks and shadow-puppets are holy objects. It is a ritual to take them even from their box. Before they can be shown, offerings must be made, magic verses chanted. Once a year, on the day dedicated to them, puppet-figures and masks, along with dancers' costumes and headdresses and all musical instruments are purified with holy water and blessed anew in each village by the local priest.

Thus the individuality of the dancer is of no importance. His performance may have unusual finish and personal charm, but with these he does not seek to express himself. These are assets that contribute to a more elegant performance

of a traditional role or dance. He is admired for his technical perfection and charm as a shadow-puppet is admired for the delicate workmanship and goldleaf. His performance, however, is exactly as it has been learned from the teacher, or worked out at rehearsal with the musicians. Masked or unmasked, he seeks only to present a character already known, or translate into stylized movement the music of the gamelan.

Sometimes, in ritual dance or on the stage, a dancer may fall suddenly into a state of trance. Then he is no longer accountable, no longer under control, for he is possessed by the god itself.

Dance and Dramatic Forms

Dance in Bali can be divided into three distinct categories: the rehearsed, the improvised and the uncontrolled performance in trance. The dancers themselves may or may not have received any formal training. The trained dancer moves in strictest accordance with the music; gesture and movement are controlled by the musical form and inner rhythm. The half-improvised steps and gestures

Processional dance performed at a harvest festival





Baris dancer

of the untrained dancer are still stylized and traditional, learned through observation and imitation. The ritual processional dances of the temple are limited to a few uniform gestures and movements. Only in the spirited performance of the *ngibing*, where a youth steps out of the crowd to dance opposite the trained dancing-girl, does the dance become a pleasurable and spontaneous act of self-expression. This dance is one of courtship, a game in which the boy attempts to get as close to the girl as possible. She, however, is skilled in evasion, deftly retiring or slipping her fan before her face when the face of her partner has come too close. In the sequence of youths and men who dance with her a great variety of moods can be seen, from the ardent and erotic to serious gravity or ironic self-caricature. There is still another type to be found in every crowd. His interest in the partner is purely formal. Withdrawn into himself, he dances as far off as possible, lost in the rhythm of the music or the pleasure of self display.

Yet all these dancers, trained or untrained, move with the same restraint, the same sharply defined articulation of the limbs and awareness of the separate units



of the body. Only those muscles immediately involved in the gesture are used; the body is always under complete control, from formal design of the hand to carefully placed foot. The dancer in trance moves very differently, either limp and dreamily swaying back and forth, from side to side, or with wild abandon, tossing and writhing convulsively, the arms flung out in full, free movement. Music is forgotten in the agonized, ecstatic release, and the dance becomes involuntary, no longer technically interesting. I shall return to the trance dancer later; it is the choreography and technique of the trained, dramatic dances of the stage that first demand attention.

To give a complete list of the dance and dramatic forms that existed in Bali in 1939 is not my purpose here. The catalogue is endless, and an analysis of the many transitional variations from ritual to secular dance is a study in itself. We must limit ourselves, therefore, to a brief outline of the principal forms of dance and drama, as they were practised and performed in the more densely populated part of the island.



The witch Chalonarang

The *baris gedé*, or warrior-drill dance, originally performed only in the temple and now incorporated into dance plays, is a dance of great tension—a controlled but dramatic display of physical vigor performed by youths or young men. The dance is based on a slow advance, thighs, knees and feet turned out, the body swaying slightly from side to side as the weight is shifted from one foot to the other. The hands tremble rapidly throughout; the expression on the face is *kras*, with wide-staring eyes, giving an effect of menace and defiance. The hands are bent back at a sharp angle from the arms, with fingers spread, taut and quivering as they gesture in the dramatic style known as *raja singa*, “king of the tigers.” *Baris gedé* is danced to a single repeated motif, with an undercurrent of loud, agitated drumming beaten out with drumsticks in rapid alternation.



Ritualistic forms of *baris*, performed by a group of older men, are still presented in mountain temples. These dances, however, have none of the dramatic tension of the *baris gedé*, and consist chiefly in posturing with weapons or in stylized imitation of animals. *Baris goak*, drill of crows, is based on bird-movement; *baris kekupu*, butterfly-drill, is performed by four young boys; *baris irengan*, drill of black apes, and *baris tjina*, Chinese drill, are fantastic variants. Other performances include dances with spears, swords or shields. *Baris pendét* is a ceremonial dance with burning incense.

The *barong*, or masked "dragon," is performed by two dancers concealed within a framework covered with horsehair, or chicken or peacock feathers. The mask, with movable jaws, has the form of a mythological "lion"; In plays the *barong* frequently represents the magic transformation of a dangerous character. Often the *barong* performs alone, especially during the month of New Year celebrations. The dance is a capricious blend of moods; the beast is formidable, shy, playful by turns. There is beautiful coordination between the two dancers, whose ankles and feet alone are visible. The footwork is light and delicate; here for once the Balinese actually dance with their feet.

The *barong* is sometimes accompanied by masked dancers. Four boys, the *sandaran*, with delicate, *alus* masks and four men, the *jauk*, with fantastic, round-

The *barong*





Above, below and opposite: Sandaran dancers

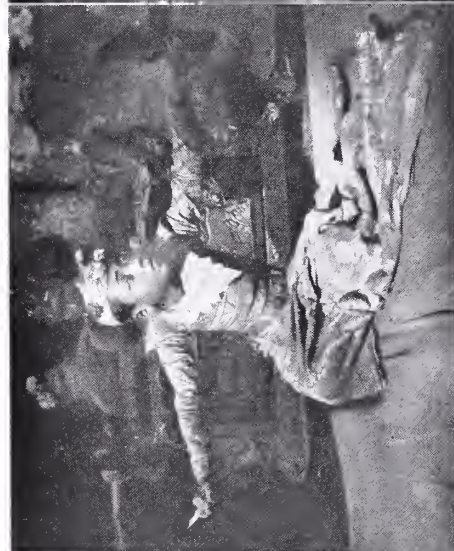


eyed masks, weave in and out in a four-square choreography. Stories are mythological or mystic. I can't resist outlining one of them here, a strange ballet connected with the five points of the compass—north, east, south, west and center.

The sorceress Chalonarang (who does not actually appear in the dance) wishes to destroy the scholars of white magic in her village, for she fears they can become dangerous to her, a practitioner of black and harmful magic. In order to protect herself, she "splits herself into five parts," four guardians and a center, and thus is able to control opposing magic forces coming from all four directions, and remain in the center at the same time. To protect herself still further she divides her now five-fold form into pairs, five watery (or female) and five fiery (or male). The ballet is a dance which symbolizes the mystic conflict between the two elements. The four boys are the female, watery guardians of the four directions, the four men the male or fiery. These eight figures dance in an intricate series of formations, intermingle, separate, and end by pantomimically merging in reconciliation. Sometimes the sorceress herself, represented by the *barong*, joins the dancers; the performance is utterly strange—a ritual whose mystic meaning is only half grasped by the spectators.

The *gambuh*, the formal, slow-moving theatre once fostered by the courts, is seldom performed today. Only a few companies remain, appearing on great ceremonial occasions. The plays are based on an old Javanese romance-cycle, in which the legendary prince Panji is the central figure. The cast of kings, princes,







Movements of the kebyar. The top and bottom sequences show the exact beginning and end of the dance

knights, ministers and squires is large. It takes all afternoon for the main characters to make their formal appearance, and the play may not advance past the opening scene before nightfall. The faces of the actors are immobile, and their voices rise and fall in the strange, artificial declamation of the shadowplay. The actors move with elegant and incredible slowness, their gestures unfolding one out of the other with the leisure of something taking place in slow-motion film.

Yet the *gambuh* play still sets the style for more recent dances and plays. Gestures, movement, character types and music are all borrowed and translated into the swifter-paced dances and operettas that are popular today.

The *topéng*, or historical mask play, deals with ancient kings and princes of Bali. In the highest courts a performance has something of the nature of exhibiting the family portraits. It is above all a ceremonial spectacle. It may be developed into a play with spoken dialogue, but in its purest form it is a silent performance by a single dancer who impersonates in turn one character after another. With his back to the audience and a cloth over his head he changes masks, removes the

Gambuh court theatre. Rival princes





Gambuh court theatre. Right: Prince Panji, the hero; below: male dancer as the lady-in-waiting or chondong



Shadow-puppet figures



Above: Prince Arjuna; left: Princess Subadra

cloth and turns suddenly round. Each dance is different; each interprets the character of the mask. There is no other dancer, unless perhaps an attendant to kneel at his feet.

Many clubs specialize in the *chalonarang* play, a spectacular dance-drama based on sorcery and black magic. The story tells of the Javanese king Erlangga, in whose reign the witch Chalonarang and her pupils brought disaster to his land. She is finally killed by a powerful holy man. The music is of violent and somber beauty, and the performance of the witch among her pupils, young girls who execute an intricate, whirling dance, has a heavy atmosphere of sinister enchantment. Most popular of all, however, is the *arja* operetta, with its Cinderella and Frog Prince stories, its heroes who fall in love with a portrait, its princesses who are led astray in the forest by a golden deer or dragonfly. There is also the popular shadowplay or *wayang kulit*, in which little figures cut from hide are shown in silhouette through an illuminated screen. The performance takes place late at night, and in the dark the screen is a luminous rectangle across which the shadows come and go, mysterious as moths flying across a beam of light. The plots are mostly from Hindu-Javanese literature; the puppets are managed by a single operator, the *dalang*, a scholar well versed in the classics and trained in the art of improvised dramatization.

There remain the two most brilliant performances of all, both danced by highly trained children. The *légong* dance is performed by two small girls, with a third, the *chondong*, or lady-in-waiting, in attendance. The *kebyar*, a recent innovation, a free, rhapsodic dance performed in seated position, is danced by a youth or small boy. Both dances require infinite rehearsal and great technical skill. Music clubs are eager to include one type of dancer or the other. Their charming appearance and brilliant movement give life and meaning to the music. They are the "flowers," the final embellishment to a performance, youthful and alert, of the more leisurely dances and plays which Bali has inherited from the past.

Dance Movements

The Balinese dancer moves within a narrow frame, out of which he never steps. It is in the narrowness of this frame, and the amazing life and freedom created within it that the beauty of his dancing lies. With the exception of those dances which take place in trance, dancing is not an ecstatic, emotional expression. It is a formal, detached and carefully worked out art based on traditional gesture and movement. It is always a refined and sophisticated understatement, reserved and stylized in even the most dramatic moments.

The basic poses of male and female dancers can be seen from an examination of the photographs. The heroic male pose of the *baris*, thighs and feet turned out, knees bent, spine erect, arms extended, head held proudly, recalls the classical pose of Indian dancing figures in bronze. It is interesting to compare the position of the *baris* dancer in the photograph on page 175 with a thirteenth-century sculpture from South India of the Dancing Krishna, a figure unknown in Balinese sculpture.



Lègong dancers

The fundamental female pose, which even untrained ritual dancers assume, is a modification of the *baris* pose. The knees are bent, but not turned out so far; the feet are close together; the spine curves outwards and the buttocks protrude. In the *légong* dance this position is intensified; the body curves in an arc which becomes more pronounced in the animated passages.

The dancer never leaps, never reaches out or upwards in open gesture. He remains firmly on the ground, moving across the surface by a controlled shift of weight from one foot to the other, the free foot raised an inch above the ground or grazing it as it moves to the next position. The normal slow advance is accomplished by the free foot moving out in an arc and returning to center ahead of the other.

Male characters of the vigorous type use a walk or stride keeping feet and thighs turned out in basic position. The females' pace is short; light shuffling steps (*segseg*) or runs carry the dancer sideways across the width of the stage in arcs, zigzags or circles. An occasional swift, tiny spring may raise her momentarily off the ground; these are rare, however, and serve merely to emphasize the energy of a rapid passage. In the *kebyar* dance, performed in a seated position with feet tucked under, the dancer moves in a curious gliding hop on one foot, while the other, serving as *point d'appui*, drags behind. The feet are concealed in the folds of the sarong, and the dancer manages to perform this difficult step without altering the basic position.

The hands are the "flowers" of the dance. In simple ritual dance or intricate, studied performance they embellish all movement. In rhythmic passages they move alertly to the syncopated accents, or vibrate rapidly from the wrist with nervous, brilliant effect.

For more energetic dances, the hand may be open, with fingers spread, or used in closed formation in a number of elegant, set designs, known in *légong* as *nawa sari*, "nine flowers." Strongly reminiscent in style of the *mudras*, or symbolic ritual gestures of the priest, these hand positions as used in the dance are purely ornamental. Unlike the technique of gesture in Indian dancing, they tell no story; they are purely abstract and never intrude upon or mar the significant outline of the dance. A few of them have dramatic meaning. Shading the eyes with the hand (*mepawasa*), fingers curved back and body drooping, indicates sorrow and weeping. First and second fingers pointing at the end of a stiffly extended arm form a gesture of anger or denunciation (*nguding*). But the names of the complete series of set positions, if they ever existed, have long since vanished.

Facial expression remains set in one of the basic representations of serenity or physical energy. In dramatic moments narrow eyes grow still narrower, round ones more staring. Eyes are slewed first to right and then to left to stress certain rhythmic accents. Accents may also be marked by a slightly raised eyebrow. In softer moods the lips may curve in a "sweeter" smile, but generally the face preserves a mask-like immobility. Only in the modern *kebyar* does facial expression become fluid. Here quick changes of expression follow and reflect the changing moods of the music—dramatic, mysterious, serene, coquettish in turn.

The rapid shoulder quiver (*engejen pala*) and slight rhythmic shifting of the head from side to side with neck erect (*engotan*), are a feature of many dances.

Arms extending sideways in a straight line from the shoulder have the elbow pointing up, the forearm bent back as far as possible, the hand turned at a sharp angle. Such a position is typical of Balinese dance movement in its emphasis and articulation of each separate join. Dance technique calls for complete muscular control in all parts of the body and an incredible degree of physical endurance.

The Trained Dancer: Theatrical Projection

While Javanese dance retains much of the two-dimensional character of the bas-relief or shadowplay, the Balinese dancer emerges boldly onto the stage, becomes dramatically plastic, with three-dimensional movement which must be interesting from all sides, for his audience surrounds him.

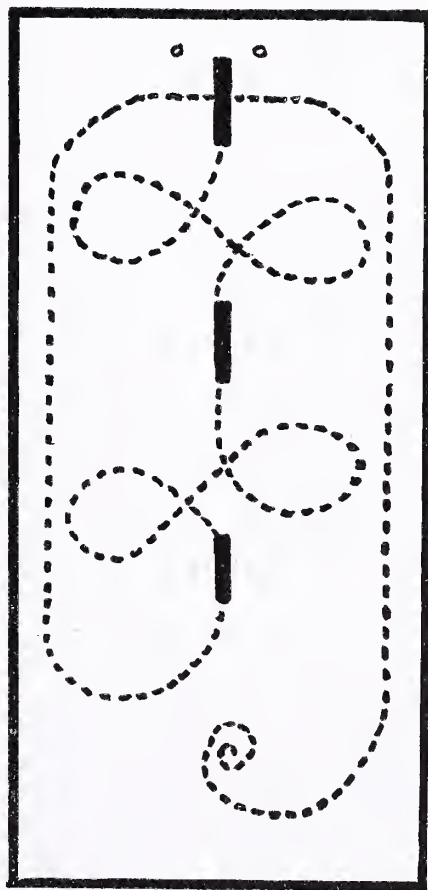
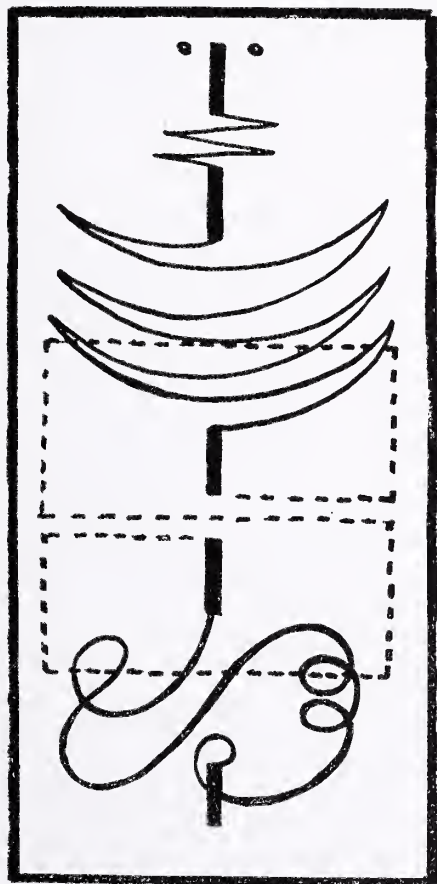
The stage is a long rectangle on the ground, within an open-air theatre pavilion (*taring*), or merely an improvised clearing in the open, its boundaries marked by bamboos decorated with leaves and flowers. At one end sit the musicians; at the other, the stage entrance is marked by a pair of ceremonial lances or parasols thrust in the earth or held upright by a pair of boys. The entrance may also be marked by gilded standards, baroquely carved in Chinese style; for dance dramas and operettas with a large cast, the entrance is concealed by a pair of curtains hanging from a wire.

Special melodies and motifs are played as cue for the entrance of each personage. So closely related to the character is the musical theme that even the smallest child knows in advance who is about to appear from behind the curtains—god, priest, lady-in-waiting, princess, prince, witch or dragon.

The effect of an actor or dancer entering the stage is that of someone approaching from a great distance. It is very much like the slow and ceremonial entrance of actors in the Japanese No theatre as they move down the descending runway that leads onto the stage. In the Balinese theatre this entrance, this emergence into full visibility is delayed as long as possible, as though the dancer could not bear to cross the magic line and step out upon the stage. If there are curtains, the only hint of the actor behind them is his voice, or the twitching folds gathered in his hands which move in time to the music. This is the dance of the curtains, a prologue to a prologue, for when the curtains finally part, the dancer remains framed in the entrance, to continue the preliminary dance that delineates his character. If no curtains conceal the entrance, the dancer approaches from an indefinite point behind. At night, as the figures slowly emerge from the darkness into the light that brings to life the gold and bits of glass in crowns and costumes, the illusion of gods manifesting themselves is complete.

These entrance dances, perhaps the most beautiful of all in their delay and abstract elegance, take a long time to perform. The dancer, finally leaving the entrance, steps out. The slow advance downstage is begun, with its sudden animated detours to right or left in the form of circles, spirals or loops. After each detour the dancer winds up in the center of the stage to resume the gradual advance. The strong feeling for balance which is fundamental in Balinese music and dance can

be seen from the diagrams below, one of which represents the entrance of a minister, the other the dance of the *chondong* or lady-in-waiting. Heavy lines indicate the slow advance, light ones, progress at twice or four times the speed. The dancer faces front during the forward progression, and in the direction of movement where indicated by dotted lines. The basic beat of 2, 4 or 8 remains unchanged; only the drumming takes on a sudden animation, "drawing the dancers forward" in the loops and spirals.



The *chondong's* dance is shown at the left, the minister's entrance at the right. These diagrams were made partly from notes, partly from memory. They do not indicate the full choreographic design.



Movements of the légong. Drawings by Covarrubias



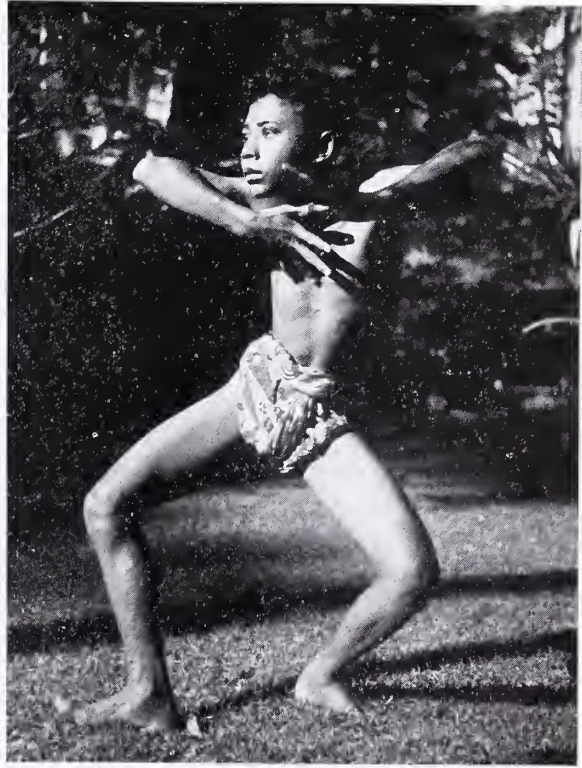
Reproduced from "Island of Bali" by Miguel Covarrubias. (Alfred A. Knopf)

The final point once reached, the minister turns and kneels as the prince steps out upon the stage. The *chondong* may continue her dance as the princess enters, or simply walk off stage to sit among the musicians and await her next cue.

Each character in the play has his special entrance dance that expresses in traditional, stylized movement his inner nature, his rank, his physical appearance. Within the narrow frame of the dance there is room for unlimited characterization. Audiences appreciate even the slight difference between the bearing of a prince and that of a minister or minor official. The princely hero is poetic; his subordinates are delicately ironic caricatures of the eternal official conscious of his own importance. In the sequence of love scenes, abductions, flights or fights, dramatic emotion is expressed in terms of dance movement and revealing but stylized gesture. Dancing and acting are so closely interwoven that it is impossible to say where one ends and the other begins.



Gandrung (popular street dance)



Student practising baris

Teacher and Pupil

There are no dance schools in Bali. Instructors are professional or retired dancers who have specialized in some one form of their art. The dance teacher is usually a man of considerable Balinese cultural background. He is sure to be a musician; he is frequently skilled in the arts and crafts, a painter, costume designer, maker of masks or puppets. Familiar with both literature and the stylized pictorial arts, he preserves the traditions of the past and hands them on to his pupils. Teachers with creative imagination now develop stylistic innovations for their pupils; others insist on a rigidly classical technique. Clubs seeking to train new dancers will choose a teacher famous for whichever style they prefer.

Dancers begin training at an early age. Children are chosen for their grace and physical charm. The two little girls who perform the intricate *légong* dance must match "like two peas." The third child, who plays the role of attendant, should contrast in appearance. Small boys selected for the modern *kebyar* exhibition



Drummers. Detail of sculpture relief from the monument of Borobodor in Central Java

dance must have a natural suppleness; for the heroic *baris*, a robust physique is needed. Slender, graceful youths are chosen for the masked *sandaran* dance, or to take the place of a girl in the popular *gandrung* street dance. Training is severe; the best teachers rehearse their pupils relentlessly for hours each day.

Before the first lesson is given, a week or more may be spent in daily massage and exercise to “soften” the body. Only when the teacher has decided the child is sufficiently limp and passive does the real work actually begin. There is no preliminary verbal explanation. It is taken for granted the pupil already has some idea of the dance—he has seen it performed so many times! Instead, the teacher walks behind him, and lightly holding his wrists in either hand, draws out his arms in the opening pose. Humming the music of the dance, he propels the small body forward, inclining it this way or that like a puppet. For days the teacher continues to lead his charge as though he were playing a fish, but the time finally comes when, with a sudden release of the hands, he launches the dancer off into space. Now at last criticism can begin, and gesture and posture be rectified through patient correction. Over and over the teacher steps out to lower an arm, straighten a shoulder, bend a hand at a sharper angle or mold the body into a more sculptural



Drummers in the *légong* gamelan

unity. Sometimes the little dancers are slow to relax. One small boy, the son of a mountain farmer, who later became famous for his brilliant performances, was the despair of his various teachers. Yet in spite of a peasant stiffness which was never completely overcome, he succeeded in giving performances of such dynamic and rhythmic precision that he drew large crowds wherever he appeared.

The little girls who learn the difficult *légong* dance work hard. They begin at the age of six or seven, while their fragile bodies are still alert enough for the lightning-swift dartings and turns, the jointless backward bends. Only after a year, when hands and feet, head, shoulders and arms, accents of eyes and innumerable details have been timed to perfection with the music will they be allowed to appear in public. By this time they have learned several hour-long choreographies, the most intricate in all Balinese dancing. For two or three years they dance at temple or village feasts, for palace or private celebrations. At the age of ten, with the approach of adolescence, they have become "too heavy." Their haunting, sexless charm, their swift, miniature virtuosity suddenly vanishes. The club looks about for new dancers, and as these become expert, the older ones retire. They never appear again, unless as members of the operetta company. But no girl dances after marriage, except perhaps as one of the group of ritual dancers in the temple.

From the beginning, the dancer learns movement and music together. These are inseparable, the expression of a single impulse. The dancer *is* the music made visible; he bears the same relation to the melody as the words to a song. At the first lessons, the melody for the dance the pupil is learning is hummed in his ear by the teacher, while the important gong and drum accents are verbally expressed as his body is suddenly jerked into different poses. But after a few days two or three musicians of the gamelan are called in to give a skeleton musical accompani-

ment, a drummer—without which no dancer can move a step, a *g'ndér* player for the melody and someone to supply the main metrical accents of the gongs. Here are the musical essentials; these three things the dancer must know by heart—rhythm, melody and metric construction. When movement and gesture reach the point where they coincide with these like well conditioned reflexes, the dance has “entered” the dancer.

Musical Form

Balinese musical form may be described as circular. Each section of a composition returns to the opening note and repeats immediately, the final note generating a new beginning. Long sections may repeat only once or twice, shorter ones more often. Brief four- or eight-note motifs or ostinatos may be repeated indefinitely, serving as mere rhythmic background for the more dramatic dances. Dances end, *not* on the closing tone, but on the sharply accented *upbeat* before it. On the final tone, which could also be the beginning of one more repetition, the dancer has already begun to relax. His closing pose is that of the beginning. In this continually recurrent music, with no conclusive ending, no true beginning, the Oriental conception of timeless, endless melody is revealed, revolving in smaller or larger cycles but never advancing to a climax.

Yet, in spite of this perfection of abstract form, the dance itself is filled with events. The circle is divided into inner sections which are marked by different systems of gong punctuation. The music itself is animated by the warm pulsation of drums which create an inner rhythm that is tense and restless, filled with disturbances and sudden agitations. Many of these disturbances are created by the metric structure; they are intensifications of accents which mark the division of the circle into quarters or eights. In Java the dancer may indicate his awareness of a metric accent by a mere turn of the head or slight pause of the hand in the middle of a phrase; the Balinese dancer dramatizes these accents by surrounding them with brilliant, turbulent movement, or coming to a sudden, momentary stop.

One may observe two quite different relationships between dancer and music. In extended metrical forms all movement is impelled and controlled by the metric structure, the divisional accents, the inner phrasing of the melody. Here the dance is purely abstract; it tells no story. A mood is created or a character presented as the dancer scans the music with gesture and movement. This is especially true of the long dance prologues of the *légong* dance. But as the story “emerges” the dancer is freed. A new relationship with the music is established. The dancer occupies the foreground, the music recedes. It is now an eight- or sixteen-note ostinato that repeats again and again to ever-changing rhythmic patterns of the drums and little cymbals. There are no longer involved metric accents to be taken into account, and the dance now has direction and wide unbroken sweep.

A beautiful example of this may be found in the dance of the *chondong*, whose progress down-stage has already been described. Her entrance and slow advance is accompanied by the short *chondong* melody, repeated over and over against animated and constantly changing drum accentuation. In the following example

I give the melody (without figuration) together with basic gong punctuation. Below the melody I have indicated the rhythm of the drums. The five lines should be read separately, one after the other. They represent the rhythmic continuity that keeps changing with the dance, while the melody continues to repeat.

But as the dancer begins moving with rapid, shuffling sidesteps to right and then to left, the melody changes to double the speed, while keeping the same fundamental beat.

In the shorter detours, four notes are sufficient to carry the dancer to the outer point, four back to center, four out to the left, four back to center; with a repetition of the pattern the dancer is brought back to center, to resume the slow advance. The second detour, in wide sweeping arcs, is twice as broad; it takes a full sixteen notes to swing from one point of the arc to the other. In their contrast to the slow advance, with its little gestures and inner accents, these wide, pendulum-like figures have a sensuous charm and grace impossible to describe. These are the interludes, of which there are many variations. The dance ends in the center, downstage, the music returning to the opening theme.

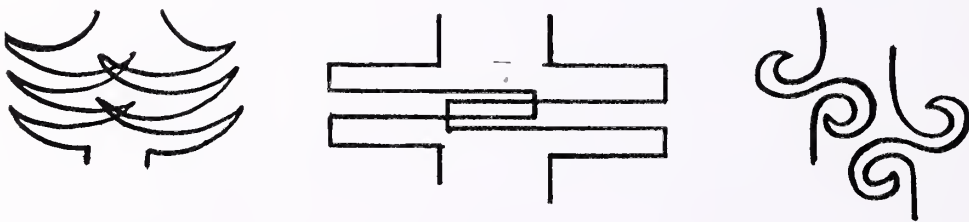
These two contrasting dance styles, the abstract and the dramatic, are frequently combined. A complete *légong* performance begins with a dance prologue, followed by a series of dramatic scenes that tell the story in the condensed formal terms of the dance, and ends with a dance epilogue that returns to the mood of the opening. One of the most popular *légong* dances during the time I lived on

the island was based on the story of Lasem, a legendary-historical prince of medieval Java.

The prince of Lasem has carried off the beautiful ward of his vassal Metaun and married her. But the princess shuts herself up in her apartments within the palace and refuses to admit the bridegroom. Lasem hears that her brother is on the way to rescue her. He prepares for battle, but before leaving begs the princess to admit him, for he is desperately in love. She opens her door, only to repulse him. On his way to battle, Lasem meets with evil omens. He injures his foot against the wheel of his chariot; a raven flies across his path foretelling his death. He is killed, and the princess is taken home.

The performance opens with the entrance of the lady-in-waiting who, after a long entrance dance, turns and presents the fans to the two dancers who stand waiting to begin. There is a short episode by all three dancers, after which the lady-in-waiting retires, to sit down by the gamelan. The prologue proper now begins. This is a long and formal episode in two contrasting movements, a slow section, grave and very elegant in style, and a light animato, in which the mood changes and the dancers seem to come to life. So far, however, they represent no one.

The choreography of this dance prologue is intricate. At first the two dancers move as though, by some optical illusion, they were the double projection of a single image. From the carefully formed design of the hand, the tilt of the head, down to the position and angle of the foot, their movements are identical. Suddenly, at an accent in the music, they break away, to go off in opposite directions. They return, but now their gestures reflect, as though one were mirroring the other. The stage is covered in the most elaborate interweaving patterns as the dancers cross and recross each other. Wide, oscillating arcs overlap at the inner points, and spirals coil and uncoil in opposite directions.



The prologue finally comes to an end. There is a fractional pause, and then the musicians sound in loud dramatic unison the cue which marks the transition from prologue to story.



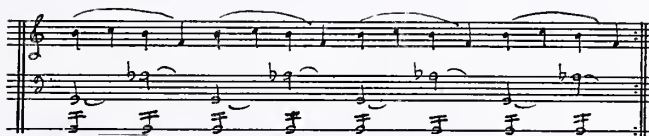
A soft prelude is heard from a single instrument, while a voice in the gamelan

sings a brief synopsis of the story. There is a light introductory passage on the drums to set the tempo, and the *pengipuk*, or love music, begins. To this accompaniment the dancers perform a lyrical *pas de deux* in which Prince Lasem's advances are repulsed by the princess. The mood is one of sensuous melancholy. The melody repeats again and again, each time with more intense drumming. As Lasem's advances become increasingly ardent the drums swell in throbbing crescendos which are periodically broken by sharp accents that coincide with every gesture of refusal.



The dance ends, and the lady-in-waiting returns to kneel before Lasem. She is his first wife, and is bidding him farewell as he leaves for battle. Lasem droops, his body suddenly limp. The scene is brief and filled with sorrow. There is only the free, half-improvised solo by a single musician for accompaniment.

The scene changes, and the child who played the first wife retires. As the lively *pangkat*, or departure music begins, Lasem, followed by the second dancer who is now his attendant, prepares for battle. They cover the stage in a series of slow advances, spiralling detours and rapid marching steps against a background of quick, syncopated drumming.



Now comes a pause, and the dancers leave the stage. While a solo musician improvises quiet melody, a voice from the gamelan sings of the approach of the raven, and the child who danced the lady-in-waiting attaches a pair of golden wings to her arms. There is a sudden, sharp signal accent from the drums, and the musicians begin the stormy *garuda* music that repeats over and over above an undercurrent of agitated drumming.

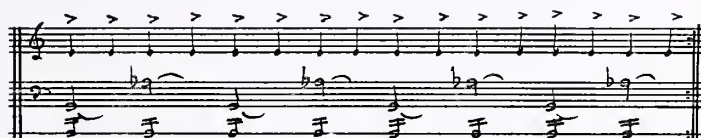




Ritual rejang dance performed by young girls



Kneeling, the raven starts her dance. The body inclines from the waist to one side, then the other, while the fluttering wings tilt at angles like a bird soaring in a high wind. This is really the climax of the performance—rhapsodic, fantastic, sombre and filled with brooding mystery. The dancer covers ground with curious little hopping steps performed while still kneeling. The music grows more violent and she rises to her feet to sweep about the stage in arcs and circles. Lasem reappears and begins to dance, while the bird crosses and recrosses his path. Suddenly it vanishes, as the second dancer, now the rescuing brother, approaches. There is no break in the tension of the music as the two dancers confront each other. In gestures of anger they slap their closed fans against their left hands and advance, left arms extended, two fingers pointing together. They engage in a duel; the closed fans wave in circles but never touch. The music has grown still more tense, a single note is repeated over and over.



At last, in the death struggle, the brother places both hands lightly on Lasem's hips, dragging him this way and that. The little figures sway like reeds in a stream. Lasem is killed with the tap of a fan and falls to the ground. His opponent continues to dance. The gamelan now modulates without a break into the "epilogue music," and the dancers return to the formal choreographic style of the prologue. Their dramatic identities have vanished; once more they scan the music with abstract gesture. The performance ends as it opened, in the same mood of calm and timelessness. The closing phrase of the dance, the *tanjek*, leads to the final pose—right hand and fan held close to the body, left arm extended level with the shoulder and palm turned back—the pose with which the dancers began, an hour earlier.

If I have perhaps described at too great length a single choreography, it is in order to show the relation between dancer and music, and how an extended ballet is constructed. I am only able to describe the metrical structure, the tempo and the basic plan for movement. Some idea of gesture, position and fluid movement may be gathered from the drawings of *légong* by Covarrubias (pp. 190-191), which catch with wonderful accuracy the swiftness and grace of the dance.

Ritual Dance

The slow-moving ritual dance of the temple, performed by the older women of the village or by a line of serious-faced youths or maidens, are beautiful in their simplicity, their grave, untroubled serenity. One notes two separate types of ritual dances; in one the dancer ceremonially presents symbolic offerings—incense, oil, wine, holy water, bearing in the upheld palm a cup, a small bottle or smoking

brazier; in the other it is the dance itself which is the offering. Dressed in finest clothes, the women with elaborate headdresses of flowers, real or golden, the men in golden headcloths, the dancers present themselves in the dance as an act of devotion.

Ritual dances vary so with the occasion and region that it is difficult to describe them in any set order. The slow, processional *rejang* is performed by the group of unmarried girls of the village. The dancers advance in single or double line, arms extended and moving up and down, hands posturing in a simplification of the complex gestures of the trained dancer. The most attractive girls, the best dancers, lead the line. In the rear are the shy, smaller girls who have just joined the group and are learning the dance by following the girls ahead of them. Movements and gestures are relaxed and simple; the important thing is uniformity.

Gabor, performed by the older women, is generally more animated and tense, and may lead up to some of the dancers falling in trance. The women dance in pairs or fours, in a more intricate choreography in which they weave in and out, cross and recross. In this dance offerings are presented before the shrines, and the dancers are frequently led by priest or priestess. The quick shuffling steps of the *légong* and frequent breaks in the movement on a syncopated accent place the performance somewhere between the simple ritual and the studied, professional dance. The music has considerable variety, based on definite dance impulses. I give one motif here, a rhythmic ostinato, which may indicate the animation of the dance.



Dancers in trance performing the
sanghyang dedari (heavenly nymphs).
Photographs. Gregory Bateson



of trance. One after another, boys and men collapse among their instruments, are helped to their feet, to step out from the gamelan and join the other dancers. At this point each dancer may be given a *kris*, to perform the ritualistic *ngurek*, the hysterical self-stabbing—a violent suicidal pantomime that rarely ends in a wound, for the dancers are closely watched, and disarmed before they can injure themselves. With some, the state of trance is brief and transitory; with others it is intense to the point of utter exhaustion. But when, by means of holy water and incense, the dancers are revived, they rise and calmly walk away as though they had never lost consciousness.

Dancers may also be brought into trance by means of incense smoke and the chanting of special magic songs. In times of epidemic (now rare), special ritualistic dances are performed nightly in the infected village, as a means of dispelling sickness. Once in trance, the dancers, possessed by a protective divinity or *sanghyang*, can consecrate water and give it the magical power of disinfection. As such it is sprinkled on the ground by the officiating priest and distributed among the people of the village.

The dancers in trance perform all sorts of feats to demonstrate their divine possession. In the dance of "sacred horses" (*sanghyang jaran*), men dance astride small bamboo sticks with little horseheads and horsehair tails. They neigh and prance jerkily, dart through burning coals scattered about the courtyard. In the dance of "heavenly nymphs" (*sanghyang dedari*), two small girls in dancing costume and elaborate headdresses dance on the shoulders of men who carry them around the clearing, their eyes closed and bodies loosely swaying. Sometimes a ladder of bare kris-blades is prepared for them, leading to a high platform. Dancing and posturing, their naked feet on the sharp edges, they mount step by step to the platform where, with eyes still shut, they continue dancing, miraculously avoiding a false step which would cause them to fall from the narrow ledge.

Though the chants that lull dancers into unconsciousness are sung in a slow, almost dreamlike manner by a group of women, once the dancers have fallen in trance the music changes. A group of boys and men now perform the *kechak*, a lively, rhythmic chorus consisting of explosive syllables half shouted, half muttered. In recent times the gamelan is used instead. While *sanghyang* societies boast their dancers are not trained, but enabled to dance through possession by the gods, this is not always the case. Rehearsals *do* take place; a few steps and positions recalling the *légong* style are practised by the little girls for the *sanghyang dedari*. Margaret Mead notes that in the village in which she lived, after a visiting *légong* performance the little *sanghyang* dancers added to their repertoire new steps which they had copied from the *légong*.

Dance performances in trance demand a special study. They have nothing to do with set choreographies and musical forms. The performance of the two little girls lies on the borderline between dance and somnambulistic pantomime. In more remote parts of the island one may still find *sanghyang* "dances" in which youths or men in trance "become" deer, monkeys, serpents or even swine. Their performances have nothing of the dance in them, but are fantastic and hysterical transformations, executed with violent and at times quite terrifying realism. They are mentioned here since they are a necessary though psychopathic detail in the picture of the dance and its function in Bali.

The Kebyar: Escape from the Past

With the popular modern *kebyar*, a brilliant exhibition dance performed by a youth or small boy, we reach the end of our survey. Here we come to the breakdown of traditional forms in both dance and music. Composition is free in structure—a loosely connected series of melodies in different moods that are given a new and glittering orchestration, while the dancer, seated in a square surrounded by the musicians, translates the changing moods into movement. He dances from the waist only, half kneeling, half sitting, moving from one part of the square to another in a smoothly gliding hop. Great emphasis is laid on animated articulation of the hands and mobility of facial expression; the face is no longer a mask but a screen which shows a succession of expressions that match the temper of the music—dramatic, serene, vivacious or seductive. Movements from *baris*, *légong*, *topéng* and *sandaran* are all incorporated into the dancer's performance, selected purely for the sake of effect and contrast. Although the dance appears highly dramatic, there is no longer question of a story; both dance and music are an exuberant display of fireworks that show off the skill of the performers to the delighted audience.

The word *kebyar* itself means a sudden release of forces—an explosion, “a flower bursting suddenly open,” the crash of many cymbals. It indicates to perfection the explosive energy and liberation of both dance and music. Musicians and dancer alike find exhilarating freedom in the rhapsodic music and choreographies that are composed, in a spirit of creative enthusiasm, for approaching festive occasions.

Dance and music are constructed together—the combined effort of the dance teacher and leading musicians of the club. Sometimes the club will buy a dance and its music from a star dancer, after permission to use the composition has been obtained from the dancer's own organization. The dancer then teaches both choreography and music to the club that has engaged him, adding, perhaps, a few novelties in the process. Most clubs, however, prefer brand new compositions in which they can make something of a sensation. They may engage a well-known *kebyar* composer to create new music and outline a new choreography; or they may prefer to compose both dance and music themselves, in which case dancer and musicians all participate, contributing ideas for gesture, movement, melody and orchestration. The composition grows from night to night as the club meets for rehearsal until, after a series of trials and rejections it reaches, a month later, its final, definite form.

With the *kebyar* a significant phase in the evolution of Balinese dance is reached. The dancer is still closely linked with the music; he is still its visual projection; his movements are still in traditional style; his facial expression, while no longer immobile, is still colored by the stylistic conventions of the mask. But there is now a strong personal appeal in his performance; individuality begins to assert itself; the dancer establishes a closer, warmer contact with his audience. It is he himself they are watching, no legendary figure from the past. They react strongly to his personal charm, his sense of the dramatic, his little innovations in hand movement, play of the eyes, manipulation of the fan. Through a long transition the dancer has emerged from sculptured stone to youthful, breathing mortal.

Glossary

arja	modern operetta based on traditional theatre, with songs in old Javanese meters
baris	ancient warrior's drill-dance
barong	fanciful masked beast
chondong	nurse or attendant of the heroine
dalang	puppet operator
gabor	women's ceremonial dance with offerings
gambuh	ancient court theatre
gamelan	orchestra of gongs, keyed instruments, drums and cymbals
gandrung	popular street dance performed by a boy
gangsa	keyed instrument which plays ornamental parts or basic melody
g'ndér	keyed instrument which plays the melody
jogéd	popular street dance performed by a girl
kebyar	modern exhibition dance performed by young boys
légong	dance derived from nandir, performed by little girls
nandir	ancient court dance performed by boys
rejang	ritual dance performed by young, unmarried girls
topéng	ancient play with masked actors
wayang	old Javanese for shadow: theatre, actor, puppet
wayang kulit	shadow-puppet play

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Acknowledgement

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